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SIPDIS

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STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL/AWH

NSC FOR KURT TONG

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM PREL PGOV VM

SUBJECT: MEETING WITH DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF VIETNAM FOUNDER HOANG MINH CHINH

REF: HANOI 872

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SUMMARY:

¶11. (SBU) On July 11, 2007, PolOffs met with long-time political activist and founder of the outlawed Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV), Hoang Minh Chinh, at his home in Hanoi where he remains under house arrest. Chinh is suffering from prostate cancer, and appeared seriously ill. Nevertheless, his speech was strong, and he briefed PolOffs on the history, formation and current operations of the DPV.

According to Chinh, the DPV continues to gain membership and collaborates with other pro-democracy groups, including the better known Bloc 8406. Chinh expressed strong support for the USG's dialogue with Vietnam on human rights and democracy and told us that international pressure on Vietnam was particularly needed now, with the GVN's recent crackdown on political dissidents and limitations on freedom of expression. Chinh expressed concern about "pro-China" elements within the GVN and made a specific request for USG pressure for the release of recently jailed human rights lawyer colleagues, Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan. End Summary.

HEALTH CONCERNs

¶12. (SBU) On July 11, PolOffs met with longtime democracy activist and political dissident Hoang Minh Chinh at his home in Hanoi. The 87-year old Chinh, a one time Communist Party ideologue and now founder of the fledgling pro-democracy group - the Democratic Party of Vietnam - suffers from prostate cancer and intestinal tract issues. Chinh is bedridden and weak but, despite his illness, he spoke strongly and at length with us about human rights and democracy issues. He says he continues to work with fellow activists Nguyen Khac Toan (septel), Tran Khue, Do Nam Hai and members of Bloc 8406 and his own DPV. Chinh has been under house arrest since his return from a late 2005 trip to the United States, and while there are reports GVN authorities have lessened restrictions, PolOffs noticed plainclothes police stationed near his home.

WITHER THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF VIETNAM?

¶13. (SBU) Chinh highlighted for us the history and formation of the DPV, and regards it as a vehicle to promulgate ideas rather than as an opposition party. The DPV is a pro-democracy group founded in 2006 and outlawed by the GVN. DPV members are not able to meet in

Vietnam, but they continue to keep in contact with Chinh by phone since his internet service has been cut by the authorities for several months. (Note: Chinh said he regularly changes his cellular phone number. End note.) Chinh said the DPV is currently working on an e-newsletter and hopes to further push the bounds of freedom of speech and internet freedom. While he would not divulge the number of members "due to security concerns," he hopes the DPV will be able to "unite people from all social strata, religions and political party affiliation and allow for their voice to be heard." Chinh was in contact with Bloc 8406 leader Nguyen Van Ly prior to his arrest and imprisonment, and stated that the Bloc 8406 Charter in part came from the DPV's draft platform.

TIME TO PRESS FOR GREATER REFORM

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¶4. (SBU) Chinh was very glad to read that President Bush and Secretary Rice directly raised human rights with GVN officials and

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added that "now is the time to apply significant pressure" on the government. He said this "has helped the situation in Vietnam." Chinh was also very supportive of action by the U.S. Congress and hoped it continues to pressure the GVN to "make human rights a priority of U.S.-Vietnam bilateral relations." He also believes the international community needs to pressure the GVN to provide for greater freedom of expression. Chinh told us that there is a strong and conservative pro-China camp in the GVN, and "the US needs to help prevent China from taking over Vietnam."

¶5. (SBU) Chinh fondly recalled his 2005 visit to the United States and the meetings he held with members of Congress and Department officials to discuss human rights. Chinh said that he has "no plans to die anytime soon because there is still so much to accomplish." Before ending the meeting, Chinh asked for USG assistance on the cases of jailed human rights lawyers Nguyen Van Dai and Le Thi Cong Nhan (Reftel).

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COMMENT

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¶6. (SBU) It is hard to gauge Chinh's true ability to "network" with other activists, especially those within Vietnam, in the wake of the crackdown here earlier in the year. He is clearly not cowed, however, and intent on remaining as active as possible. End comment.

MARINE